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THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Note verbale dated 21 May 1996 from the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Centre for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliments to the Centre for Human Rights and has the honour to enclose herewith a study entitled "The Impact of the Blockade on the Educational Sector in Iraq".

The Permanent Mission of Iraq should be grateful if the said study could be circulated as an official document of the forty-eighth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, under agenda item 8 entitled "The realization of economic, social and cultural rights".

THE IMPACT OF THE BLOCKADE ON THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN IRAQ

The Government of Iraq has always supported the educational sector in our country since it is a basic human right and obligation included in our Arab-Islamic heritage and expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This sector has witnessed remarkable growth in its various fields. But due to the unjust blockade imposed on our country the educational institutions suffered considerably, directly and indirectly, in terms of quality, efficiency, and input, in various areas including:

1. The Area of Arab and International Cultural Relations

(a) The blockade influenced scientific communications with the world in the field of publications, research, and literature due to cultural boycott, and shortage of hard currency leading to purchase cultural references from external sources.

(b) Decrease in Iraq's participation in Arab, Islamic and international meetings due to its inability to afford the expenses of participation in these scientific and cultural activities. Thus Iraq was unable to benefit from these meetings. Moreover, the Arab Nation, the Islamic countries and the international community were also deprived of the contributions of the Iraqi nation represented in its scientists and experts.

(c) Freezing most cultural agreements concluded between Iraq and other countries for the purpose of isolating Iraq culturally and depriving it of participating in mutual, international and cultural efforts. Thus the interests of Iraq and other countries were seriously damaged.

(d) Ceasing to delegate Iraqi missions to study abroad and the difficulties facing Iraqi students abroad resulted in further loss to Arab technical experiences.

(e) Scarcity of participation by Iraqi experts and scientists in the activities of international and regional committees. Therefore they had no access to the latest scientific research.

(f) The resolution related to freezing Iraqi assets abroad caused acute deficiency in monetary liquidity to Iraq abroad, resulting in closing up many Iraqi schools in which hundreds of Iraqi and Arab students used to study. During the school year 1990/91, the number of these schools amounted to 16 schools (primary, secondary and preparatory) which served 7,913 male and female students compared to 11 schools in 1993/94 with 520 students of both sexes. Thus the Arab Nation lost a significant cultural and educational source which served in bringing up and educating Arab children. The number of Arab and foreign students sponsored by the Iraqi Government, which amounted to 520 in 1989/90, dropped to 209 in 1993/94 in addition to closing up cultural offices abroad.

2. The Area of Implementing the Ministry's Developmental Plans

(a) The blockade represented a major obstacle in the way of implementing the developmental plans and projects related to the maintenance

of school buildings, improving their functioning level and preserving approximately 11,000 school buildings, of which 8,613 buildings were in dire need of maintenance and repair work according to our latest statistics. Due to the blockade, the Ministry was unable to obtain financial allocations, in hard currency. Furthermore, there is urgent need to build schools in certain governorates to solve the problem of overcrowded schools and put an end to double-shift and three-shift system schools, but it is difficult to achieve this goal due to the high prices of building materials.

(b) Due to the blockade, the sewerage system in a number of school buildings was damaged, flooding these buildings with sewer effluent from sanitary facilities.

(c) The project of using computers in teaching and learning which the Ministry has undertaken to implement since 1982 include 500 microcomputers to be supplied to 220 secondary and preparatory schools. Owing to the blockade, the implementation of this project was suspended.

(d) The difficulty of providing hard currency to finance the Great National Religious Campaign launched in 1993/94 for the purpose of developing Islamic education and teaching the holy Quran and the Prophet's Sunna. The countries which retain Iraq's frozen assets and the boycott committee did not respond, despite the importance of this Campaign in teaching the new generation the values of faith and sound conduct.

3. The Area of Providing Requirements of Education

(a) There is evident shortage in the requirements of the educational process, such as educational technologies, teaching aids, laboratory materials, publications for school libraries, physical education supplies and school furniture. There is also difficulty in providing chalk, paper, stationery and children's toys. Some educational productive institutions have ceased to operate, particularly presses which print textbooks and factories which produce exercise books and school furniture (desks, chairs and blackboards). There is a need to import 500,000 teaching aid units (laboratory equipment). There is also difficulty in providing wood, which resulted in a shortage of 650,000 school desks. The Ministry is unable to meet the requirements of the normal anticipated increase in the number of students during the next few years.

(b) Detention of goods valued at 11 million dollars to improve paper to be used in printing textbooks. The shipment was returned to the countries of origin before it reached Al-Aqaba port.

(c) The Sanctions Committee attached to the Security Council to permit a Pakistani company to supply Iraq with pencils for schoolchildren. In fact, the Ministry finds great difficulty in providing exercise books, pencils and rubbers for approximately 5 million learners at various levels of general education. The Ministry is able to cover only one third of their need for basic requirements. This situation will have negative effects on the efficiency of the educational process. Moreover, these materials are very expensive in the local market owing to the shortage of raw materials.

4. The Area of Services Rendered to Students

(a) Inability to provide heating and cooling services in schools. Malnutrition and exposure to cold weather caused spreading of diseases among students. Some of the common diseases were flu, rheumatism, tonsillitis, acute bronchitis, typhoid, mumps, asthma, measles and diarrhoea. Exposure to diseases led to an increase in absenteeism and sick leaves resulting in low performance and poor school level.

(b) Lack of sanitary requirements in schools, such as detergents, disinfectants and first aid materials, aggravated the risk of children's exposure to infections and spread of diseases.

(c) Difficulty of transporting children from homes to schools and vice versa increased drop-out. This impedes implementation of international conventions especially the World Declaration on Education for All, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the objectives of the mid-decade defined by UNICEF up to the end of 1995 related to the delimitation of the problem of drop-out and emphasizing basic education.

5. The Area of Providing Care for Children in Kindergartens

One of the negative effects of the blockade was the drop-out of kindergarten children for various reasons including high transportation costs, suspension of the nutrition programme, scarcity of toys, games and teaching aids in addition to economic, family difficulties and health problems. Statistics indicate that the number of drop-outs during the school year 1993/94 totalled 17,346 children of both sexes, at a percentage of 18.26 per cent, compared to 13,738.

6. The Area of Students' Drop-out and Failure

The blockade caused a decrease in the number of students at all educational levels and a high percentage of failure and drop-out. During the school year 1994/95, the number of drop-outs at the primary level amounted to 86,413 male and female pupils, at the rate of 3 per cent, whereas at the secondary level is was 62,345 male and female students, at the rate of 6.18 per cent. As for the number of failures at the primary level, it amounted to 427,672, at the rate of 14.68 per cent, whereas the number of failures at the secondary level amounted to 286,998, at the rate of 28.44 per cent.

7. The Problem of Quitters in the Area of Teaching

Members of the teaching personnel and other workers in the educational sector suffer deeply the effects of the blockade and the rising living costs which expose them to severe psychological pressure. Some of them were obliged to work overtime to meet the basic needs of living. As a result of exhaustion and overwork, many of those fell victim to different diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, fatigue and over-anxiety. Their condition reduced their educational productivity affecting unfavourably the students' school level. Statistics reveal the seriousness of this situation. The number of

teaching personnel who quit work as of the end of June 1994 was 2,908 out of the total manpower in the educational sector which amounts to 261,216. This resulted in 1,769 vacant hours vacant classes per day.

The circumstances resulting from the unjust blockade led to a severe shortage in the teaching cards at all educational levels. Primary and secondary schools suffer from a shortage of 12,512 male and female teachers in various specializations, whereas the shortage in vocational education amounted to 1,000 vacancies during the school year 1994/95.